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together, share approximately the same dialect) and differ considerably one from the other as regards social organisation and ritual observances. These differences all occur nevertheless within certain cultural limits, such as the broad lines of megalithic culture which they all share in common and the matrilineal moieties which persist among them despite the overt patrilocal organisation, as well as many linguistic similarities over and above their common Austronesian basis, these similarities occurring most strikingly in the common use of the same, or approximately the same, terms in connexion with megalithic rites, of which the most obvious is their common use of the word Maki.

Of all these languages, that which differs from the others most is that of Vao, not only in vocabulary but also in pronunciation, since, by a peculiar forward movement of the tongue between the lips, certain consonants take on a very un-Malekulan form, making it difficult at first hearing to distinguish between, for example, *t* and *d*, or *m* and *n*. This is most striking to the European in its effect on the consonant which elsewhere in Malekula is pronounced *w* or *v*, and which in Vao sounds like a voiced *th* (*dh*) very similar to the *th* in the English word *the*. Other sound-changes are that Malekulan *g* is softened to *gh* and Malekulan *s* becomes *h*. A notable example is the pronunciation of the word used for the Guardian Ghost, which in Atchin (which retains the Malekulan consonants) is *Le-saw-saw* and in Vao is *Le-hev-hev*, pronounced in a manner that at first hearing I transcribed as *Le-heth-heth*. This sound *th* is characteristic also of certain tribes on Santo. Since all words in which it occurs can, however, be traced to their parallels on Atchin and elsewhere I do not propose to confuse the philological issue by rendering this aberration in print, and wherever this sound occurs in Vao I shall render it by the more usual Malekulan *v*.

From every one of these coral islets may be seen each morning, when the weather is not too stormy, a fleet of small canoes sailing or paddling to the mainland, where the natives of each island have their gardens. For the islets themselves are too small and their soil too shallow to support their population in garden produce, and are, moreover, largely given over to the rearing of pigs, which in their younger stages (before the tusks have appeared and are therefore liable to be damaged if their owners were allowed to run wild) are permitted to forage where they will. It is this habit that has given rise to the French saying that each island is a *parc au porcs*. This is not true if it be understood as meaning that the islands are a mass of wandering pigs; but is true to the extent that no young succulent plant is secure from the occasional ravages of these animals without very heavy fencing to protect it. For this reason the natives have their main gardens on the adjacent mainland, large tracts of which are regarded as the property of the island immediately facing it, and only certain ceremonial gardens surrounded by carefully

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constructed fences are made on the Small Islands. The daily exodus of canoes to the mainland, after the leisurely taking of the morning meal and when the sun is already high in the sky, is one of the most delightful sights in the whole archipelago. The return takes place during the late afternoon, when each canoe comes back separately, laden with yams [1] wrapped in leafy parcels, bunches of bananas, bread-fruit and other delicacies with which to prepare the evening meal, or towards the festive season, with larger quantities of yams to store on special yam-tables raised above the ground and roofed so that the accumulated food-stuffs may be kept dry.

Since few years pass without some small war breaking out between the various communities inhabiting these islands, it might be thought that their island position would fit them admirably to serve as small fortresses with the sea acting as a surrounding moat. But this is only partially the case, since, as we shall see in the chapter on warfare, the war-making unit is never the island, wars being usually internecine, founded on a standing enmity between two Sides of the same island, and when alliances take place these are with the corresponding Sides of other islands or with certain villages of the adjacent mainland, among all of whom the same dual organisation exists. These wars, however, rarely result in much bloodshed, and are but one aspect of the creative rivalry between otherwise friendly groups on which, as will be seen later, the social organisation of these islands is based.

APPROACH FROM THE SOUTH

If now we approach these islands from the south, whence the patrilineal influence has come and whence also most white men approach them after entering the archipelago at the port of call in the island of Fate some 100 miles to the south, our first introduction to the natural forces that have pushed up the North Central New Hebrides from the ocean bed is the active volcano of Lopevi rising sheer out of the water. Passing to the left of this, the next impressive sight is the large island of Ambrim, crowned by an active crater with innumerable small fissures around it, whence comes the volcanic dust that, mixing with the coral sand and humus of the Small Islands forty miles to the north-west, gives their dancing-grounds the peculiar surface that renders them so soft and firm for dancing, and at the same time is heavy enough not to rise. From the same source come also the currents that sweep in a north-westerly direction up the Malekulan coast, causing certain beaches to have a fine grey sand called "black sand" while others that

[1] Taro, the staple diet on Oba, is not grown here, for lack of terracing and irrigation, but a species, called by the name of *na-mbel*, has recently been introduced as food for pigs.

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361 [792] between these two Sides. Close to this now stands the Roman Catholic Mission, and separating this beach from Kowu is a sandy spit now called by the white men Point Vidil, after the Mission founder, who died on the island on Easter Eve 1898.[1]

BRIEF NOTE ON EVERYDAY LIFE

512 If in the cool season, we may now rest awhile on any one of these beaches, watching the still splendour of the tropic noon or, at low tide, minute blue fishes swimming in the pools. Small girls, perhaps, will pass looking for shellfish on the reef, or an occasional old woman seat herself beneath a shady tree on the shore side to plait.

During most seasons of the year it would be possible during the middle of the day to walk from one end of the island to the other without seeing a soul, save, maybe, for old women too feeble to work, old men who, after a recent performance of the Maki rite, have taken vows to stay at home, together with their wives who now must feed them since they are too holy to touch their own food, small children, or a young man sick with yaws. Everyone else is busy on the mainland, and the Small Island is empty of human life.

But, if we wait till the late afternoon, a very different scene meets our eyes. Now, one by one, canoes laden with produce put out from the mainland creeks, each making for its own landing-place on Vao. Bananas, yams, green "native cabbage," mangoes, mammy apples, perhaps a flying fox, fish caught in traps (there is no hook-and-line fishing), parcels of sundry foods tied up in green leaves, all are unloaded amidst laughter and a general sense of well-being after a cheerful day. Canoes are dragged ashore. Children and young boys bathe, shouting and slapping the water to keep off stray sharks. The women carry the produce homeward. The men see to the gear. Parties enquire from one another how the day has fared. And so, with endless delays, gradually the beaches empty and the villages become alive.

House-enclosures.

342 592 Within the village[2] each married man possesses an enclosure, fenced round with stones usually surmounted by a high screen of interwoven

[1] Père Vidil died from eating a dish of crayfish that had gone bad. His death was wrongly attributed to the malignity of the Vao folk, who were accused of having poisoned the crayfish. Mgr. Douceré hotly denies this imputation (see Douceré, pp. 202 ff.).

[2] This paragraph is based on my knowledge of conditions on Atchin, where I made detailed records of the arrangements inside the house-enclosures which I did not repeat on Vao. A much fuller description, together with native terms, will be given in a later volume. So far as I know, the conditions described here do not differ greatly from those on Vao, though the organisation into Lodges given in the following paragraph differs considerably from that on the remaining Small Islands.

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After a time one old man will get up and close the debate by announcing in a loud voice the conclusion that has been reached. The young men have taken no part whatever in the discussion, the whole debate having taken place between the members of the first two ranks.

Position of women.

It is assumed often, on account of the dichotomy between the sexes already mentioned, that the position of women in these islands is a very inferior one. This is, however, only partially the case. It is of course true that they are not held in such high esteem as in the matrilineal islands further north. Nevertheless their position is infinitely better than among the Big Nambas who inhabit the neighbouring plateau of North Malekula. Though in the Small Islands men occasionally beat their wives and white men tell gruesome tales of ham-stringing by jealous husbands, such actions are rare and are by no means generally approved. If matters get too bad, the wife can leave and go back to her own people. If she persists in not returning and has the backing of her own relatives, these pay back the pigs the husband has given as bride-price, and she is free to marry again. But all the numerous minor pigs ceremonially presented to the wife's relatives are not paid back, so that the husband is the loser, even in pigs, and has therefore, if from this point of view only (which of course is not the only one), every inducement to make his wife's lot a contented one. During pregnancy and for some months after the birth of a child she is, moreover, carefully, almost fiercely, watched over by her own people, who at times take possession of the husband's house in order to ensure her welfare. Nor is the women's lot in the gardens too hard. Though she does indeed do most of the carrying, specially heavy loads are carried by the men, and though in the matter of time she is busy for longer periods, the heavy work of cutting down the trees, burning the scrub, and generally clearing the ground is done by men, while in the planting of the yams both share, and it is not unusual to see a husband with his wife and children all busy on the same yam-mound. At home, she feeds most of the pigs, but the most valuable tuskers are cared for by the men who are to sacrifice them. Women also have certain Lodges of their own which men may not enter, and receive complimentary titles when their menfolk perform the Maki rite.[1] They are said also even to perform a kind of secret Maki of their own.

Interior of houses. Tools and other domestic objects.

On the evening of any ordinary day, when no particular rite is in progress, the men and women, after seeing to the safety of the canoes in which they have returned from their mainland gardens, having each taken their own separate paths up from the shore and then shared the

[1] See p. 394.

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common way leading to the village, go together into their dwelling enclosures, where the women set about cooking, while the men glance around their property to see that everything is in order and no untoward circumstance has occurred during the day. If we now accompany a man into his house we shall see, firstly, at the far end and somewhat to one side, the pit for his earth-oven, and, on the other side, a small bamboo frame, furnished with wooden pillow, and covered with a mat roughly plaited from the fronds of coconut leaves, which is his bed. If a young son is living with him, there will be two. Both beds are on what is called the "Upper" side of the house. This may be either side, but once chosen cannot be altered. Stuck into the thatch, or hooked on to the rafters which support it, grimed and preserved with the smoke of innumerable fires, are the objects he treasures. Polished stone blades hafted to adze-shaped handles for heavy garden work, felling of trees, cutting of roots. Shell adze blades, similarly hafted, for carving and for hollowing out canoes and gongs. Both these in many different sizes, and the latter of different shells, the larger ground down from giant clams and the smaller from small spiral shells. The delicate jaws of flying foxes, bracelets of pigs' tusks or turbo shell, arm-badges such as have been already mentioned. Feathered head-dresses for various occasions, badges of office or of Maki degree. Bunches of leaves for magic. If he is a sorcerer or rain-maker he will have, hidden away, the carved rain-stones and much other paraphernalia essential to his trade.

Cooking the evening meal.

Having surveyed these, the native home from his garden will decide whether to eat in his own dwelling-house or with his fellows in the precincts of the Lodge. If at home, his wife cooks for him, though not on her fire but on his. More usually, however, he will go to the Lodge. Here other men of his joint-family are gathered. Inside the Lodge the large earth-oven, a hole dug in the ground, sometimes surrounded by a lining of stones, is emptied. Fresh firewood is brought and kindled, or the old fire made up. On this round pebbles are laid to heat. Meanwhile the evening meal is being prepared. Yams, the staple diet, are scraped on to a leaf. If the day is an ordinary one, and no sacrifice has been recently performed, the only adjuncts are such small titbits as have been gathered during the day—an odd breadfruit or two, leaves of the native "cabbage," a flying fox, fish, shell-fish, turtles' eggs, prawns, eels, but if there has been a sacrifice, parts of a pig, or fowl. These are all placed on the yam-scrapings, and a fresh layer of these placed on top. Then the whole pudding is wrapped in layer upon layer of leaves so as to preserve it from direct contact with the fire or earth, and to keep in the juices. Meanwhile the pebbles placed on the fire have become red-hot. Half these are now removed by means of wooden tongs, and the wrapped